

August 5, 2025

Meilad Rafiei

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

Honorable Fernando Aenlle-Rocha  
First Street Courthouse  
350 W. 1st Street, Courtroom 6B, 6th Floor  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

To Honorable Fernando Aenlle-Rocha:

I am writing this letter in full support of my sister, Melahat Rafiei, who I have had the privilege of knowing not just as family, but as a mentor, business partner, and one of the most compassionate individuals I have ever encountered.

As the oldest of three siblings, Melahat naturally stepped into the role of caretaker and guide from an early age. Our family immigrated from Iran to the United States as political refugees in 1982 when I was only 11 months old, and Mel was just five years old. Even as a child, she experienced and shouldered the weight of that journey and the hardships that followed. As an adolescent, while our parents worked tirelessly to build a new life from nothing, Mel took care of me and our sister, making sure we were safe, fed, supported, and loved. That early experience shaped her into the strong, empathetic, and dependable woman she is today.

Throughout my life, Melahat has been a constant source of strength, wisdom, and unwavering support. She is the sister who has always been there for me during my most difficult moments, and the one I look up to for guidance. When she became a mother, I saw her natural ability to nurture and lead flourish even further. She taught me not only how to be a better brother but also how to be a better parent.

One of the most profound examples of Melahat's character has been in the way she navigated a very difficult divorce. Despite the challenges of co-parenting, Mel never allowed her personal feelings or emotions to overshadow what was in the best interest of her son, Kian. Her priority has always been, and continues to be, Kian's wellbeing and future. She demonstrated remarkable restraint, patience, and maturity by refusing to get caught up in unnecessary battles, instead focusing all of her energy on creating a loving, stable environment for her son. This period of her life showed me, and everyone around her, what it truly means to be a selfless and devoted parent.

As we grew older, we became business partners, working together in multiple ventures. From those experiences, I witnessed firsthand her remarkable work ethic, integrity, and resilience. In times of financial hardship or high stress, Melahat never faltered. She was always the first to offer her time, resources, and emotional support, regardless of whether the responsibility fell within her role. Her "never give up" attitude and

willingness to go above and beyond became the foundation for my own professional growth and success. Clients and colleagues alike came to admire her ability to handle challenges with grace all while working tirelessly to get a positive outcome.

Beyond her contributions to our family and our businesses, Melahat has always been deeply committed to **standing up for what is right**. From a very young age, she demonstrated uncommon courage, never hesitating to speak out against injustice—whether advocating for women’s rights, LGBTQ rights, or the fair treatment of others. As a teenage boy, I often found myself embarrassed at family dinners when she challenged my language or viewpoints, but those conversations shaped my understanding of true empathy. I vividly remember how passionately she would engage with our Middle Eastern parents on the topic of gay rights, often bringing the discussion back to a simple but powerful question: “What if it were your own son? How would you treat him?” These heartfelt exchanges, while uncomfortable at the time, had a profound and lasting influence on me. Melahat has always led with a moral compass rooted in inclusion, kindness, and fairness, regardless of personal cost. That same compassion extends beyond family and friends into the broader community, where she has spent years volunteering, advocating, and helping people in need—many of whom she has never even met. For her, empathy is not occasional; it is a guiding principle.

It is impossible for me to reconcile the Melahat I know: a loving sister, a devoted mother, an ethical businesswoman, and an advocate for those without a voice, with the situation she currently faces. Melahat Rafiei’s absence would leave a void in our family and community that cannot be overstated. She is a daughter who honors her parents, a sister who has been a lifelong anchor to me and our sibling, a mother who has guided her child with strength and kindness, and a community member who has made it her mission to contribute positively to those around her, regardless of their status in society.

In every facet of her life, she exemplifies integrity, dedication, and love for others. It is for all these reasons, and so many more, that I ask you to consider the full measure of her character as you evaluate her.

Sincerely,  
Meilad Rafiei

Honorable Fernando Aenlle-Rocha  
First Street Courthouse  
350 W. 1st Street, Courtroom 6B, 6th Floor  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

April 8, 2025

Dear Honorable Aenlle-Rocha,

I am writing to provide a character statement for Melahat Rafiei, an individual who has profoundly impacted my life and the lives of many within our community. As a dear friend, I have had the privilege to observe Melahat in various roles: a devoted mother, daughter, sister, aunt, an active community member, and an exemplary leader in the workplace.

One of Melahat's most admirable qualities is her dedication to motherhood. She has consistently demonstrated an unwavering commitment to nurturing and supporting her children, ensuring they thrive in an environment filled with love and encouragement. Her children are a testament to her effective parenting, exhibiting kindness, resilience, and an innate sense of responsibility.

In addition to her role as a mother, Melahat actively engages with the community, embodying the spirit of service and collaboration. She volunteers her time, talents, and resources to her son's school in addition to various local initiatives, demonstrating a profound concern for the well-being of others. Her contributions have significantly enriched our community, as she consistently rallies support for important causes and fosters a sense of unity among diverse groups.

Furthermore, Melahat excels as a leader. Her leadership skills are exemplary; she creates an inclusive work environment that celebrates diversity and encourages open dialogue. Notably, she has shown remarkable compassion and understanding towards my disability, offering support and acceptance as an employee and now friend that has greatly impacted my life. Melahat took a chance and hired me after I was laid off at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. During meetings and events, she made sure that all spaces were wheelchair accessible and that I had all the tools I needed to excel at my job. When Melahat was looking for a new home, she prioritized finding one with a full restroom on the first floor, and furnished it with ramps so I'd feel welcome, comfortable and independent. Her ability to empathize and advocate for others makes her not only a respected employer but also a cherished friend.

In summary, I wholeheartedly endorse Melahat Rafiei as an outstanding individual whose remarkable qualities as a mother, community member, and professional create a positive and lasting impact on those fortunate enough to know her.

Please contact me if you require further information.

Sincerely,

JENNIFER KUMIYAMA

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Jennifer Kumiyama

**LAW OFFICES OF  
FRANK P. BARBARO, APC**



JULIA A. DECLARK

August 5, 2025

Honorable Fernando Aenlle-Rocha  
First Street Courthouse  
350 W. 1st Street, Courtroom 6B, 6th Floor  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Dear Honorable Fernando Aenlle-Rocha,

My name is Julia A. DeClark, and I am an attorney practicing in downtown Santa Ana, where I serve our community's legal needs with the same dedication instilled in me by my late mentor, Frank P. Barbaro. When Mr. Barbaro passed away from pancreatic cancer in 2019, I inherited not only his practice but his unwavering commitment to justice and community service—values that have shaped my twenty-nine years in the legal profession.

Throughout my tenure with Mr. Barbaro from 1996 to 2019, I witnessed firsthand his extraordinary work ethic as both a distinguished civil litigator and Chairman of the Orange County Democratic Party. His dual commitment to legal excellence and political engagement demonstrated that true service requires tireless dedication across multiple fronts. It was through this intersection of law and civic duty that I came to know Ms. Melahat Rafiei, whose own remarkable journey embodies these same principles.

When Mr. Barbaro introduced me to Ms. Rafiei in 2006, he did so with profound confidence, recognizing in her the qualities essential for transformative leadership. As Political Director and later Executive Director of the Orange County Democratic Party, Ms. Rafiei demonstrated an unparalleled work ethic that impressed even someone as demanding as Mr. Barbaro. Coordinating with his incredibly complex litigation schedule required not just flexibility, but the kind of persistent dedication that ensures no community obligation goes unmet.

From the instant I met Ms. Rafiei I was impressed with her advocacy, her fierce determination to affect the climate of politics and her love of her community.

What strikes me most about Ms. Rafiei is her authentic compassion paired with unwavering determination. In the often-contentious world of politics, she navigates competing interests and challenging personalities with remarkable grace, never losing sight of the community she serves. Her advocacy stems not from personal ambition, but from a genuine desire to improve lives and



strengthen our democratic institutions. This compassion extends beyond political boundaries—during my darkest period following Mr. Barbaro's passing, Ms. Rafiei provided the kind of support that sustains both individuals and communities through difficult transitions.

Over the years, Ms. Rafiei and I have remained friends despite Mr. Barbaro's resignation from the party and sad passing. I have only ever been able to survive in the legal profession by surrounding myself with strong, intelligent and hardworking women. Ms. Rafiei is one of the women in my circle of women that I feel I can rely on, discuss issues with and know that no matter where I am in my life's journey she will encourage my growth and success.

After Mr. Barbaro's passing, I needed strong women to encourage my path and allow me a shoulder to cry on. Ms. Rafiei was one of the women in my circle that I would turn to often. We would hike and talk. I would go to her house on a Friday night and cry my eyes out. She would feed me and sit with me redirecting me towards happy reminiscing and reminding me of greater things to come.

I honestly do not know how I would have survived my period of grief without her. While the grief still lingers, my friendship and love for Ms. Rafiei continues. We still talk on the phone, meet for coffee and support each other in happy and uncertain times.

I was honored to be asked to write this letter on her behalf. It is my humble opinion that Ms. Rafiei has made the world a better place and will without a doubt continue to do so. I know that I cannot live without her and never intend to.

Please feel free to contact me directly if you would like to discuss this letter further. Thank you for your time and attention.

Very Truly Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Julia A. DeClark". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Julia A. DeClark, Esq.  
Law Offices of Frank P. Barbaro, APC

April 24, 2025

Honorable Fernando Aenlle-Rocha  
First Street Courthouse  
350 W. 1st. Street, Courtroom 68, 6th Floor  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

My name is Kimberly Hernandez, and I had the privilege of teaching Melahat's son in my second-grade classroom at Oakridge Private School. I'm writing this letter not to speak to the legal matters currently before the court, but to share my personal experience with Melahat and to offer insight into her character, her values, and the genuine impact she's had on the people around her.

Throughout the year I taught her son, Melahat was a cornerstone of our classroom community. She was consistently present — always ready to help, whether that meant organizing classroom parties, chaperoning field trips, or quietly supplying whatever the class needed. She never asked for recognition. She simply gave, wholeheartedly and without hesitation. But what left the deepest impression on me was her gentle, unwavering compassion — especially toward students who needed extra support. There was one child in our class who was going through a difficult time at home, and Melahat immediately noticed. She made sure that child felt included, seen, and cared for. Her empathy helped create a classroom environment where every child felt valued.

Her kindness wasn't limited to our school. I also had the opportunity to witness firsthand the kind of child Melahat is raising. Her son, much like his mother, is an incredibly respectful, kind, and compassionate young person. One particular moment still stands out to me. During a school fundraiser, he noticed a homeless man nearby. Without saying a word, he quietly walked back to his car and retrieved a care package, one he had prepared and kept in the car specifically to give to someone in need. He handed it to the man with such humility and care. I later learned that he makes these packages with his mother and keeps them ready, just in case they come across someone who might need help. That single moment said so much about who he is, and just as importantly, who Melahat is as a mother.

She's raising her son to be a source of light in the world, a young man who is thoughtful, giving, and compassionate toward others. And in my experience, that doesn't happen by accident. It happens when a child grows up surrounded by those same values, modeled consistently and with love.

Since that school year, Melahat and I have remained friends, and our friendship has only deepened my respect for her. She is someone I know I can always count on. No matter what she's doing or how busy her day is, she shows up without hesitation, without conditions. When I've needed help, support, or simply someone to talk to, she's been there. That's just who she is:

the person who puts others first, who lifts people up quietly and without expectation of anything in return. Her friendship has been a gift in my life.

I understand the seriousness of the charges Melahat is facing, and I do not intend to diminish the importance of the legal process. I only hope to add another layer to how she is seen, as a devoted mother, a generous community member, and a woman whose everyday actions have quietly uplifted those around her. I believe we are all more than a single moment or decision. And the Melahat I have known is someone whose presence has made the world around her kinder.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter and for considering this part of her story.

With sincerity and respect,  
Kimberly Hernandez  
Second Grade Teacher and Friend

**Honorable Fernando Aenlle-Rocha**

First Street Courthouse  
350 W. 1st Street, Courtroom 6B, 6th Floor Los Angeles, CA 90012

January 26, 2023

Your Honor:

I have known Melahat Rafiei for nearly twenty years. She and I have shared a political journey, I as a public official and she as a democratic leader here in Orange County, the state and national democratic party level, and as a campaign manager and consultant. Melahat has always impressed me for her work ethic, her willingness to help others, her dedication to her family and her embrace of democracy. Her experience escaping Iran with her family as a child has influenced her life in profound ways. Her life, career and positive profile have been built through passion, focus and determination. No one has given her anything. On the contrary, she has helped support her family financially, she has helped advance the ambitions of others, she has put the weight of her credibility and network behind candidates she believes will truly serve their constituents and communities and she has always been willing to stand with people through their own challenges and struggles.

On the last point, a personal story. Melahat served as my campaign manager when I ran for congress in the 2010 cycle. The campaign was launched in early 2009. I had recently completed my second term as mayor of Irvine, CA and eight years on the Irvine City Council. Three months after we launched the campaign, we lost our 22-year-old son in a tragic accident just a week before he was to graduate from college. Melahat was on holiday out of the country with her then husband but immediately came back to help us navigate our way through the fog of grief. Family tragedies are hard enough without your pain playing out on a public stage. Melahat organized people to take shifts receiving flowers and cards on our doorstep so we could rest. She managed press inquiries and coordinated with others to take as many additional burdens off our shoulders as she could. She stood in our darkness and protected us, showing extraordinary compassion — all while managing the day-to-day requirements of a congressional campaign.

Years later, after I left public office in 2016, I shifted to coaching and advising candidates for public office. Between 2019 and 2022 I worked with Melahat and her firm to coach and advise some of their candidates. I have seen first-hand, the positive and meaningful impact Melahat has had on the political landscape here in Orange County. As an immigrant and a woman of color, she has dedicated herself to helping get more women, particularly women of color, elected to public office. She has broken barriers as the first Iranian-American to serve as Executive Director of the Democratic Party of Orange County, to win a seat on the Democratic National Committee and to serve as secretary

of the California Democratic Party. None of these opportunities were handed to her. She proved herself, earned support, did the work and inspired others.

The last point I'd like to make is about Melahat as a mother. I visited Melahat in the hospital after her son Kian was born. The love I saw her exhibit as a new mother has only deepened over the years. There is a strong bond between mother and son, and his academic success, musical talent on piano and drums and kind, gentle nature reflects the interests and priorities Melahat has raised him to honor and embrace. I know the greatest fear for Melahat is that she may be separated from her son, and her legitimate concerns about the emotional impact that could have on his life.

Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to share my thoughts about Melahat.

Beth Krom  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]



August 1, 2025

Honorable Fernando Aenlle-Rocha  
First Street Courthouse  
350 W. 1st Street, Courtroom 6B, 6th Floor  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Dear Honorable Fernando Aenlle-Rocha,

Last summer, Melahat and her son came to visit San Francisco and we met up for a wonderful lunch. Her son, Kian, is a year older than my twin boys and at least a foot taller. He's got so much of his mom in him, including her beautiful skin and kind eyes, which is why it didn't surprise me when Kian showed me what he'd brought with him in his backpack. He'd heard about San Francisco's homeless population, and he'd convinced his mom to help him make little packages with snacks, hygiene products, etc. to hand out to those in need while in town. He was 11.

I begin with this story because it speaks to the integrity, heart and generosity that Melahat Rafiei brings to everything she touches. From her work, to her community, to her family, to her beautiful gentle giant of a son – Melahat is a good person.

I first met Melahat in 2008 or 2009. I was moving back to California from the east coast and reached out far and wide to meet folks in the political world back in my home state. I don't even remember who suggested I meet with her, but I'm so glad they did. Melahat was immediately gracious, introducing me to strong women in the area and showing her trademark generosity to help support women in the political space.

Over the years, we never saw each other regularly, but each time we did was a beautiful reunion. And every time I heard anyone speak about their work with her, it was effusive. The description was always the same: Melahat puts her passion for helping people succeed, fighting for the little guy, delivering for her clients and her beloved community ahead of her sanity and her bottom line. From the moment I met her, I never knew Melahat to be anything but full of integrity and best intentions.

I remember when she told me she was going to be a mom. We were in Sacramento for the California Democratic Party convention. Melahat saw me from across the room, left her meeting to come and give me a huge hug and share her exciting news. She was full of joy and excitement for the next stage in her life. Melahat could have been sitting with the most important person in the building (and I can assure you that I was absolutely not

important at all), but the real-life bliss of expecting her son and sharing that with others was more important than any political meeting could have been.

Today, I know that version of Melahat to be true. Her family is her guiding light. She spends her days caring for her community, spending time loving and supporting her extended family, doting on her dog and raising her beautiful son. She deserves to continue to do that good for the people around her, and the world deserves to receive it.

She has admitted to her mistakes, she has expressed remorse, and I can confidently say that Melahat's time would be better served giving back to her community than anywhere else. Melahat is truly a good person. She is raising a good human. And she is doing good for her community. I ask the court to recognize that and allow her to keep doing it.

With respect and gratitude,

Natalie LeBlanc

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

Law Offices of  
**Devermont & Devermont**  
A Professional Corporation

Henry Devermont (1917-1991)  
Dennis H. Devermont (Retired)  
Derek Devermont

Office Locations

Los Angeles  
Bellflower

Please reply to  
Los Angeles

February 6, 2023

To the Honorable Judge:

I understand that Melahat Rafiei's sentencing has been assigned to your court. Thank you for reading this letter and taking the time to consider the thoughts of someone who has interacted with Ms. Rafiei in political arenas and considers her a friend.

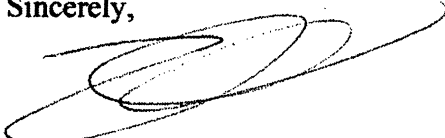
Ms. Rafiei is a good person. She possesses a trait so rarely found in society: kindness. I have witnessed Melahat lend a hand, often two, to lift those whose success benefits her in no observable way. I have seen her mentor and guide young, ambitious future leaders who needed to be given the time of day by current leaders but were ignored. This is the Melahat I know.

I know her as honest. I've seen her in personal and political scenarios refuse to lie to benefit herself and suffer consequences due to her honesty. I've known people to ask her to hedge on truth and play games with words, but every time Melahat refused.

What I admire most about Ms. Rafiei is her motivations for the political causes she championed. Power or financial gain was never paramount for my friend. She is guided by a deep sense of duty to lift those who need lifting, to give voice to those who cannot speak, and to embolden those who stand afraid.

The person described above is the Melahat Rafiei I know and have come to trust. Please consider these factors in sentencing.

Sincerely,



Derek Devermont  
Attorney at Law

DD/DD

### My Friend Melahat

I first met Melahat around 2013-2014 at the California Democratic Party Convention. I was impressed with her conviction and support of Democratic Party and its values. Melahat is an Iranian-American, and like myself, is an American by choice, who truly believes in the US constitution and its values.

I quickly realized that we both hold the ideals, the protection of women's rights, human rights, the 1<sup>st</sup> amendment protections of religion freedom that comes from a secular state, and cultural pluralism.

Melahat strongly believes in motherhood, and it shows in her compassion. She believes, as I do, that a woman has the right to make her own decisions that affect her health. And should have the access, and control over the medical decisions that affect her body.

I know Melahat through her activism. Melahat and I worked together on increasing participation of Iranian Americans in local and state politics. Melahat worked closely with the Iranian-American community in Southern California and encouraged young Iranian Americans to get involved with and helped to set priorities for community outreach. Her guidance, mentorship, and unrelenting drive was instrumental in establishing this group as an active, effective and responsive organization to policies impacting Iranian-American residing in California. It was because of her efforts, the number of Iranian Americans ADEM delegates increased from a only handful to 24 in 2021.

Melahat helped her community become recognized within the state democratic party when the California Democratic Party recognizes the Iranian New Year called Norooz, a cultural celebration that is observed by Iranians around the world, and it was because of her efforts she was able to bridge increasing inclusivity between the state party and her community.

Melahat, I and a few Iranian-American activist have been planning about establishing a statewide Iranian American Democratic Organization to educate Iranian-Americans and new immigrants about democratic values and civic engagement.

When I am not engaged as an activist in Santa Clara County, I manage an electronics engineering and manufacturing company with my husband in Northern California.

It saddens me the hear about Melahat's hardship and current predicament. Melahat is a force for progress within her community and provides an energetic focus that is essential in any activism that seeks to create positive change.

I proudly call Melahat my friend.

Sousan Manteghi-Safakish

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

*a.e.*

~~10572 Orange Park Blvd, Orange, FL 32832-1504~~

~~404-225-0630~~

~~angelahaj@aol.com~~

Feb. 03, 2023

Dear Judge,

I am writing to you today to provide my personal testimony to speak on behalf of my friend, Melahat. I have known her and her son for 5 years now, ever since they first joined the school community. Ever since then, Melahat has been a very involved mom in the classroom and the school.

She is a dependable and knowledgeable resource that the school turns to in times of need. From volunteering for school events, to organizing fundraising activities for the students, to providing organizational support for the classroom, and even providing extra 'mom' advice along the way - Melahat is always there, willing and ready to help.

She has also become a dear friend of mine - not just another classmate or parent. She is always a call away, willing to listen to her friends, drop whatever she's doing to help, and offer generous advice and support.

In my personal opinion, Melahat is a great asset To our school community, city and me personally.

Please take all of this into consideration as we highly value Melahat's presence.

Thank you and well wishes.  
Angela El Haj



Honorable Frenando Aenile-Rocha  
350 W. 1st St.  
7th floor #6B  
Los Angeles, Calif 90012

August 05, 2025

Your Honor,

I am writing on behalf of my longtime friend Melahat Rafiei. I have known Melahat for over twenty years. I met her when I was a volunteer for a candidate who was competing in the presidential primary. Mel was a well-known community organizer then and I was just beginning to learn the ropes of volunteering for such a big campaign.

The candidate was Howard Dean, and I remember one particularly night, when we had rented the Hard Rock Cafe for an event. There were many well-known performers who had agreed to join us, and Howard was generating a lot of interest at that time. When I arrived several hours before we were set to begin, lines had already begun to form along Sunset Boulevard. We did not have near enough manpower to get those folks checked- in and admitted to the venue. I was really concerned and had no idea what to do next when Melahat arrived with two full busloads of volunteers from Orange County. She immediately assessed the situation and put her team to work, helping to sort out the lines of attendees and make sure that everyone was sent to the right place. The folks on the L.A team were not only very impressed, but truly grateful. Mel taught us how things are done that night. It was a lesson we took to heart.

We stayed friends long after that campaign ended. We saw each other through the joy of a first marriage for both of us and ultimately the heartbreak of its end. Melahat became a mother, and it changed her world forever. Her devotion has never wavered, she is a soccer mom, a basketball mom, a spelling bee mom and a homeroom mom. She is always there supporting Kian and helping him navigate through the ups and downs of childhood.

Melahat comes from a large family and is also a devoted aunt, sister and daughter. She makes sure that her son gets plenty of time to be with his cousins in order to build a strong foundation with his relatives. She has gone to great lengths to make sure that her son has his father in his life. Once when Mel wanted to take Kian to Hawaii, she generously offered and helped to pay to bring the boy's dad and his new wife along on their vacation. I was so impressed by that, by her dedication to the principles of family.

Mel is the kind of friend to whom one can turn, and many have, for help. Need to research a new medication? She can help. Need to understand a proposition on your sample ballot? She can help. Need to place your dog in someone's care while you see your mom through surgery? Mel can and will help.

Melahat is a very skilled professional and has been much admired for her ability to organize and to lead. It has been my privilege to have her in my life, she is a good friend and an inspiration.

I thank you for your time and attention: Please feel free to contact me with any questions.

Sincerely,  
Beth Broderick

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

Julia Kleyman  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

August 4, 2025

The Honorable Fernando Aenlle-Rocha  
First Street Courthouse  
350 W. 1<sup>st</sup> Street, Courtroom 6B, 6<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Dear Judge Aenlle-Rocha:

I am writing to provide a character reference for Melahat Rafiei. I feel compelled to attest to Melahat's exceptional character, because I have seen Melahat do incredible things to help people, myself included. I first met Melahat more than sixteen years ago, when she and her then-husband rented an apartment from my spouse and me. Melahat was not only a model tenant, but also a model neighbor and fast friend. Melahat helped with a variety of building beautification initiatives, fed our cat when we traveled, and left our rental apartment better than she found it upon moving out with ample notice.

We continued our friendship well beyond the point when we lived next door to each other. In 2011, after knowing Melahat for approximately 3 years, I was diagnosed with kidney failure. It was an incredibly difficult time in my life, as I was in my late 20s, on dialysis, with an incurable chronic illness. Melahat was not only one of my greatest cheerleaders and most compassionate friends at this time, but she also was practically helpful in unexpected ways. I had to move to Boston temporarily to get the care I needed. Melahat came to visit me, spoke to me regularly, encouraged me, and generally helped me to imagine better days. Incredibly, Melahat also used her skills and experience to hold a fundraiser for me. The inability to work—and having to leave my job practically overnight with no warning—created significant financial stress, and Melahat took initiative to use her knowledge and network to help alleviate some of this pressure. Melahat conceptualized and realized a well-attended fundraiser with live music, a silent auction, and an educational component on renal health and kidney disease. I am forever grateful to Melahat for this incredible act of kindness and practical help when I needed it most.

Shortly after, I got a kidney transplant and Melahat had a baby. I must mention Melahat as a mother, because in this facet too she is exceptional. Melahat is an incredibly supportive, affirming, kind, patient firm, authoritative, and loving parent. Even through difficult times such as adjusting to new custody arrangements after a divorce, Melahat's compassion,

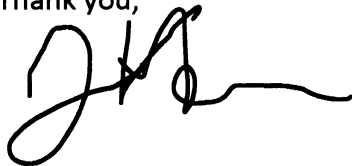
understanding and patience for her son always shined brighter than any problem. The result is an exceptional young man: the most polite, inclusive, loving, community-minded adolescent boy I have ever met—and I have met many, being a former teacher. If anything, the consideration of allowing Melahat to continue to raise Kian as she has should be taken seriously. Melahat's son, with the presence and support of his mother, is someone we desperately need in our next generation of leaders.

In the last two years, I have seen Melahat do something else that I consider absolutely extraordinary. In the midst of the difficulties Melahat has faced over the recent years, Melahat's ex-husband Kwame and his current wife both became seriously ill one after the other. The ex-husband's wife Melissa was in a coma, eventually coming out of it with partial paralysis and significant mobility challenges. When it was time for Melissa to leave a fulltime medical care facility, Kwame was in the hospital and was therefor not available to bring Melissa home to care for her. Melahat took Melissa into her home and took kind, compassionate care of her physically through many difficult and intimate challenges until Kwame was well enough to take over care. This was a situation that posed significant physical challenges for the caretaker. Melahat had no obligation to do this, and in fact most people would not put themselves through physical and psychological hardship to care for their ex-husband's new wife. Melahat did it without obligation, compensation, or expectation, and she did it with great kindness, compassion and humility.

Lastly, Melahat has always been a deeply thoughtful person. My favorite thing about Melahat is that she engages in true, honest introspection. She strives to be better and do better, and she is not blind to her mistakes nor to her opportunities for spiritual, moral and intellectual growth. I fully believe in Melahat's ability to take the right lessons from life's circumstances, and to carry that knowledge with her on a continuous growth trajectory.

I truly appreciate your regard for this communication.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'JK' followed by a long horizontal flourish.

Julia Kleyman

David Robert Heywood  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

August 3, 2025

Honorable Fernando Aenlle-Rocha  
First Street Courthouse  
350 W. 1st Street, Courtroom 6B, 6th Floor  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Dear Judge Aenlle-Rocha,

I am writing to you regarding Melahat Rafiei, a friend of over 20 years.

Melahat and I first met socially through mutual friends and our paths soon began to cross regularly as we were both involved in Young Democrats and other organizations in which we learned to effectively give back to our community, a passion and value Melahat continues to live today.

I was inspired by Melahat's recent efforts to organize food drives and other types of assistance for those in various immigrant communities who have been negatively affected by ongoing events. This type of compassion and community service has been a theme throughout the time I've known her.

Over the course of our long friendship, I have witnessed Melahat mentor numerous young people to become hardworking, ethical and effective community leaders. She often teaches through example, organizing relief efforts, making allies where there were enemies, and taking on whatever amount of work was needed to create change and make progress on the issues affecting those she cared about.

I have always found Melahat to be a kind and caring friend, willing to drop everything at a moment's notice if you need something. Several years ago, I was very sick for several days and was so miserable I couldn't leave the house. Melahat went out of her way on a particularly busy day to drop off some medicine. There was also a time when I needed some honest advice about a professional matter. Melahat was direct but helped reposition my thinking to help me see it in a positive way that was more helpful than I could have imagined.

I have also seen firsthand what an amazing mother Melahat has been to her son Kian. Because of her influence and parenting he has become a kind and caring young man; the type of person we all want our young people to become.

I hope my letter has helped you see a more complete picture of who Melahat Rafiei is, both as a person and a friend.

Sincerely,

David Robert Heywood



August 4, 2025

Honorable Fernando Aenlle-Rocha  
First Street Courthouse  
350 W. 1st Street, Courtroom 6B, 6th Floor  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Dear Judge Aenelle-Rocha,

My name is Theresa Cruz, and I am writing on behalf of Melahat Rafiei, who is scheduled to appear in court on August 22, 2025. I have had the privilege of knowing Melahat for the past eight years, having worked for her at Progressive Solutions Consulting.

In 2017, Melahat took a chance on me, a recent college graduate with no political experience. She saw potential in me when others might have overlooked it. She hired me, mentored me, and played a pivotal role in shaping me into the young, Latina business owner I am today. That's who Melahat is at her core: someone who lifts others up and opens doors that might otherwise remain closed.

I watched her go above and beyond to support and elect first-time candidates who wanted to make their communities better. She championed LGBTQ+ candidates, candidates with disabilities, women of color - people whose voices are often underrepresented in government. Melahat has always been deeply committed to building a more inclusive and diverse political landscape, and her impact can be felt by many at the local, state, and national levels.

Professionally, Melahat is one of the most hardworking and dedicated women I have ever met. She constantly pushed herself and those around her to strive for excellence. She led by example - with integrity, intelligence, and compassion. I was continually inspired by the way she applied her political expertise to advise clients and serve her community, including her leadership as a DNC member and as Secretary of the California Democratic Party.

As a boss, she was both demanding and deeply supportive. When my car broke down and I was saving up for a new one, she gave me a bonus that helped cover the down payment. She even bought me an iPhone so I could do my work more effectively. After long hours meeting deadlines and helping our clients reach their goals, she made sure we had time to recharge and reconnect, organizing team-building trips, including one to Hawaii, so we could bond not just as colleagues, but as a family.

Even when she made the difficult decision to close her business, she put her employees first. In my case, she helped me launch my own company, even suggesting the name "Cruz Control Consulting" and guided me through the challenges of being a first-time business owner. She helped me retain clients and offered advice every step of the way. I can say with absolute certainty that I wouldn't be where I am today without her belief in me and her mentorship.

Melahat genuinely cares about those around her. Her compassion, loyalty, and dedication to others are evident in everything she does.

Perhaps most importantly, I witnessed her incredible love and devotion as a mother. Her son, Kian, is her whole world and they share a truly special bond. Melahat is a nurturing, attentive, and deeply loving parent who always puts Kian's well-being first. The environment she has created for him is one filled with warmth, encouragement, and unwavering support. As Kian enters his teenage years, her presence in his life is more crucial than ever. These are formative years that will shape the young man he becomes and one thing I know for certain is that Kian needs his mother, and she needs him.

Melahat Rafiei has made a profound and lasting impact on my life and on the lives of so many others. I offer this letter as a testament to her character, her generosity, and her lifelong commitment to empowering those around her.

Sincerely,  
**Theresa Cruz**

Date: August 4, 2025

Honorable Fernando Aenlle-Rocha

First Street Courthouse

350 W. 1st Street, Courtroom 6B, 6th Floor

Los Angeles, CA 90012

Re: Character Letter for Melahat Rafiei

Dear Judge Aenlle-Rocha,

As a woman small business owner and active member of our community, I've come to deeply value qualities like accountability, empathy, and quiet strength. These are the very qualities I've consistently seen in Melahat Rafiei over the years I've known her.

Melahat is not only a strategic and thoughtful professional, but also a devoted single mother to a young son. That role defines her just as much as any title or accomplishment. Her son relies on her deeply—not only for stability and love, but as a model of perseverance and integrity. I have seen firsthand how seriously she takes that responsibility. She makes sacrifices, shows up consistently, and leads with a kind of courage that only a parent carrying it all on their own can truly understand.

Beyond her dedication to her son, what has always struck me most about Melahat is her generosity—especially toward those less fortunate. She quietly gives her time, energy, and resources to those in need, never seeking credit or attention. Whether it's supporting a struggling neighbor, mentoring someone trying to find their footing, or lending a hand during difficult times—she does it all with genuine care and no expectation of anything in return.

We all face moments in life that test our strength and resilience. I believe these moments must be seen in the full context of a person's character. In my experience, Melahat is someone who learns from adversity, stands by her

values, and continues to lift up those around her—often while carrying far more than most ever realize.

I offer this letter not because I was asked to, but because I truly believe in the strength and integrity of Melahat's character. She is a committed mother, a generous member of our community, and a person of deep principle.

Thank you for considering my perspective.

Respectfully,

Mona Azar

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

August 5, 2025

The Honorable Fernando Aenile-Rocha

First Street Courthouse

350 W. 1<sup>st</sup> Street, Courtroom 6B, 6<sup>th</sup> Floor

Los Angeles, CA 90012

Re: Melahat Rafiei

Dear Judge Aenile-Rochja:

I am writing this letter to provide you with information about Melahat Rafiei based on my personal experience .

For background, I'm a married father of 7 children. I'm an attorney although not actively practicing at this time and with no disciplinary action taken against me. I met Melahat in 2006 as I was a successful candidate for a trustee position with a community college district. Over the years she helped me as my treasurer doing the reporting for my campaign committee account. She was always professional, honest and helpful in keeping my committee to follow state law.

Melahat and I became friends through mutual friends and I would see her and others at community events. She was always straight up with me, telling me when she thought I had done the right or wrong thing on the college board. She would not hesitate to disagree with me but was always respectful. She said she liked the fact that I treated people fairly, but she also helped me by being critical when I did not live up to what she thought should be my standards. One time there was a candidate for a Long Beach office whom many of the political establishment avoided because she would stand up for the underdog all the time. Melahat said I should help her, and I did. I'm a better person because I stood up for the candidate (who ended up winning). Melahat was also a wonderful mother and the times I was around her and her son the boy seemed very happy.

I don't mean to minimize her conduct that got her into this situation before your court. I do believe that she realizes the mistakes she made and has learned a lesson from this experience. If Your Honor has any questions, I would be happy to answer them.

John R. Hanna







positive example to Kian, who truly respects, admires, and *likes* his mom. I wish all kids were like Kian.

I hope you read this letter with an open mind and recognize the honesty with which it is written. I truly admire and love Melahat. I want the best for her. I hope that includes your compassion and sense of fairness and justice.

With deepest respect,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sarah A. Pirch', with a stylized, cursive script.

Sarah A. Pirch

[REDACTED]

August 5, 2025

Honorable Fernando Aenlle-Rocha  
First Street Courthouse  
350 W. 1st Street, Courtroom 6B, 6th Floor  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Your Honor,

I have known Melahat since 2009, when she was running a Congressional campaign in Orange County. Even before then, I was aware of her work on local races—often as my opponent. While others criticized me for working across party lines, Melahat respected my perspective and actions, seeing value in understanding diverse views. We shared a belief that democracy works best when all voices are heard.

Though we were at times on opposite sides politically, Melahat was always kind, witty, and grounded. Unlike many state leaders, she remained approachable, especially with those of us from Orange County. She always welcomed and included me and regarded me as an intelligent, outspoken woman of color, and I always appreciated her warmth and inclusivity.

Over the past few years, our friendship has deepened. With more time in her life now, she has an even more generous, compassionate presence—someone I've personally leaned on during difficult times, including while fostering infants. Most recently, while I was fostering several young infants (not having children myself), Melahat came to my rescue on several occasions when I was beyond tears and overwhelmed to help me play with one of my children so I could take a shower, nap and eat. She showed up without hesitation when I needed help the most.

As a Christian, I believe in grace, growth, and redemption. Melahat has faced this crisis with humility and strength. She is deeply reflective and genuinely concerned about the impact on her 12-year-old son, who depends on her so much. Her absence would be devastating for him. I truly believe she is learning from this experience and is committed to doing better, for herself, her community, and especially her son. I pray so often that you are willing to consider her giving and compassionate nature when you consider her sentence.

Respectfully,

Christine Villegas

August 2, 2025

Honorable Fernando Aenlle-Rocha  
First Street Courthouse  
350 W. 1<sup>st</sup> Street, Courtroom 6B, 6<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

To Honorable Aenlle-Rocha,

I am writing this letter on behalf of Melahat Rafiei, whom I have had the pleasure of knowing for over eight years. I first met Melahat through her son, who was a student in my third-grade class. From the beginning, she has demonstrated herself to be a supportive and nurturing parent, with a remarkable and loving relationship with her son.

Throughout the school year, Melahat frequently volunteered in the classroom, assisting students and chaperoning field trips. She was always willing to help—whether it was organizing classroom events, supplying materials, or simply lending an extra hand. Even now, though her son has moved on from my class, she continues to offer support whenever she is on campus, helping out with various school events, and often bringing coffee for teachers as a thoughtful gesture to brighten our day.

Over the years, Melahat and I developed a strong friendship that I deeply value. She is a kind, generous, and cheerful individual whose presence is always uplifting. I have witnessed the strength of her relationships not only with her son but also with her family and friends. She is someone I know I can rely on without hesitation. When I was preparing for a recent move, she immediately stepped in to help and provided numerous helpful recommendations for local services.

It is with great pleasure that I call Melahat a friend, and I hold her in the highest regard.

Sincerely,

Laura Wolfe  
Third Grade Teacher

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

Honorable Fernando Aenlle-Rocha  
First Street Courthouse  
350 W. 1st Street, Courtroom 6B, 6th Floor  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

August 4, 2025

To the Honorable Fernando Aenlle-Rocha:

1989. That's when I first met Melahat (and her family). It was a beautiful spring day at a local park where we all met to celebrate the last day of Persian New Year festivities. We connected from the start and kept in touch even after she moved down to So Cal. We eventually became roommates for a few years when I moved down here. And since then, I've seen her during all that life brings – good times, bad times, joys, tears, new loves, heartbreaks, ambitions, fears, and best of all, motherhood. Throughout the years, I've been lucky to know the Melahat we all love and adore.

Melahat is the light of the party. Literally. Anytime she walks into a room, everyone is drawn to her. She brings to every gathering her outgoing nature while connecting with everyone she meets. And her laugh – it's literally from her heart.

She is also a very giving person. Whatever she has, without hesitation, she will give it away. You need a ride – she's there. You need to vent – she's there. You want to help those in need – she's there. Years ago, a friend of mine had come down to visit. She complimented Melahat's nail polish color. Melahat goes to her bedroom, grabs the color, and gives it to my friend to have. Needless to say, my friend was touched by her thoughtful gesture.

The most wonderful life event I've witnessed Melahat go through is motherhood. Kian is so loved and well taken care of. He means the world to her. He is part of her heart and soul. And you can tell what an amazing kid he is all because of Melahat. As a single parent, she doesn't let anything stop her from giving Kian all that he deserves. From experiences to adventures, even ones out of her comfort zone, she makes it happen.

Despite what life may throw at her, she is resilient and hard working. She loves with all of her might. She is giving without hesitation. She doesn't let her fears and challenges stop her from experiencing life. She strives to do the right thing in any situation. And best of all, anytime she falls, she gets back up and dusts herself off while laughing at herself and moves forward with her head held high. She is a strong woman. She is a mother. And she is a friend.

Kindest regards,

Sayeh Koetsier

**Lucifer Keener**  
Former Vice-President  
Oceanside FireFighters Assosiation, Local 3636

Date: August 2, 2025

**Honorable Fernando Aenlle-Rocha**

First Street Courthouse  
350 W. 1st Street, Courtroom 6B, 6th Floor  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

**Re: Character Letter for Melahat Rafiei**

Dear Judge Aenlle-Rocha,

Let me say this as clearly and personally as I can: Melahat Rafiei is one of the most intelligent, honest, and grounded people I've had the privilege of working with—and knowing as a friend.

We met in 2009, when I was a public safety labor leader suddenly tasked with winning a ballot measure campaign—without any prior experience. I was overwhelmed. From our very first meeting, Melahat stood out. Her strategic mind was undeniable, but what struck me most was her candor. She never sugarcoated the truth, never postured. She challenged ideas, sharpened our thinking, and held firm to her convictions. That earned my professional respect—but it was what happened after the campaign failed, just as she had predicted, that earned my trust. She didn't walk away. Instead, she stayed. She helped us regroup, rebuild, and ultimately reclaim our voice and credibility.

All professional relationships that grow deeper have a turning point. For me, that moment came a few months after the birth of her son, Kian. I had just been re-elected Vice President and was hoping Melahat would officially join our team. We met for a lunch meeting with our locals President—strictly business at first. But when our third companion stepped away to take a call, the tone shifted. Sitting side-by-side, two blunt personalities dropped the formalities and talked openly about life changes and parenting—how deeply humbling, frightening, and transformative it is. In that moment, I saw someone not just skilled in her craft, but full of heart, self-awareness, and humanity. My respect for her expanded into something much more enduring.

Over the years, through countless conversations, campaigns, and personal moments, I've seen Melahat remain consistent in her integrity, commitment, and care for others. She pushes people to be better—not for show, but because she genuinely believes in their potential. And when things fall apart, she doesn't disappear. She leans in. I've seen her do this again and again.

I write this letter not because I was asked, but because I know who Melahat is. Whatever circumstances bring us to this moment, I hope it is also a moment in which the totality of her character is considered. She is a person of deep integrity and loyalty, who has given much to others without seeking recognition.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my perspective.

Respectfully,


August 6, 2025

Honorable Fernando Aenlle-Rocha  
First Street Courthouse  
350 W. 1st Street, Courtroom 6B, 6th Floor  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Your Honor:

I have had the pleasure of knowing Melahat Rafiei since late 2008. At that time, I was just her brother's girlfriend, and today I am proud to call her my sister-in-law—though in truth, I refer to her simply as my sister, because no blood tie could make us any closer than we already are.

Melahat is a devoted and deeply caring aunt to my three children, who love and adore her just as much as I do. The bond she shares with them is truly special and irreplaceable. My youngest daughter is currently only 3 years old, and the thought of Melahat not being present in her formative years rattles me to my core.

My eldest daughter, now 10, looks forward to her weekly hangouts with Khale Melahat and her cousin Kian. Their time together is filled with meaningful conversations and learning moments. Just the other day, my daughter asked her aunt to explain taxes—something I happily deferred to Melahat, as she has a gift for explaining complex topics and genuinely enjoys helping children understand the world. I trust her completely to guide my daughter through those important developmental years. Losing that connection would be deeply detrimental to my daughter's emotional and intellectual well-being.

My 6-year-old son shares a special bond with Kian, his only male cousin. Because Kian is in Melahat's care, our families are able to spend valuable time together regularly. If that caregiving relationship were to change, it would severely limit our ability to maintain that close family connection, especially between the children.

Beyond being a wonderful aunt and sister, Melahat has been an unwavering source of support for me personally. As a full-time working nurse, a busy mother of three, and someone actively involved in my community, I rely on a strong support system—and Melahat is a major part of that. Whether I need help with the kids, emotional support, or someone to show up at a community event, she is always there without hesitation. She shows up for me in ways both big and small, and that reliability means the world to me.

To say Melahat is an integral part of our family would be a gross understatement. She is a pillar of strength and compassion, someone I deeply trust and admire. Her presence uplifts everyone around her, especially my children, and I cannot imagine our lives without her in it.



Melahat has always had my complete trust. She has never done anything to compromise that trust. One of her most defining qualities is her honesty—she will always tell me the truth, whether it's something I want to hear or not. That level of integrity is rare and deeply valued.

In short, Melahat is a loving, trustworthy, and irreplaceable member of our family and community. Her continued presence in our lives is essential, and I sincerely hope you will take this into consideration when evaluating her character.

Sincerely,

Nour Rafiei

Honorable Fernando Aenlle-Rocha  
First Street Courthouse  
350 W. 1st Street, Courtroom 6B, 6th Floor  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

April 12, 2025

Dear Honorable Fernando Aenlle- Rocha:

I am writing in support of Melahat Rafiei. I have known Melahat since 2017 when our children began their school journey together in preschool. She has been an avid and active supporter of her child's education and has been actively involved in school activities. Not only has she volunteered her time in the classroom to assist teachers but she has been an active member within our private school community assisting the school in ways that help education and safety in our neighborhood as a whole. For example, there was a proposal by the city to alter utilization of an area of land adjacent to our school campus which may have significantly compromised the health of our children. Recognizing the impact this proposal would have on not only her child, but all children, parents, teachers and the neighborhood at large, she stopped everything she was doing to advocate for the benefit of the school community. She singled handedly worked to prevent passage of this proposal. She wholeheartedly cares about our community, our children, and those around her.

There have been numerous occasions as well where Mel has offered her time, guidance and assistance to my son when I have been unable to be present for field trips, school parties, special events and activities. The most recent being a field trip the Newport Beach Environmental Nature Center in April of this year. I have felt full confidence and faith in leaving my son in her hands knowing that she would treat him as her own. Her selflessness, her compassion, and her dedication to family and friends is evident in the many relationships she maintains and easily obtains.

She took the initiative to connect the parents in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade class by creating a contact spreadsheet to assist in keeping lines of communication open with parents. She volunteered her time to start a text message thread and in doing so welcomed new parents to the school and engendered their seamless assimilation to the Oakridge community.

She is completely dedicated to her son, Kian. She keeps him engaged, enhances his breadth of knowledge and growth by enrolling him in sports and taking him to professional sporting events. I don't remember an after school game when she wasn't present to support her son's participation in a basketball game whether it was a home game or an away game.

I consider myself lucky to know such a warm, dedicated, selfless and compassionate individual. If I can be of further assistance or answer any questions, please feel free to reach out.

Sincerely,

Priya Shah, MD

[REDACTED]

Meymanet Rafiei Ganwani  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

April 3, 2025

Honorable Fernando Aenlle-Rocha  
First Street Courthouse  
350 W. 1st Street, Courtroom 6B, 6th Floor  
Los Angeles, CA 90012  
Subject: Reference for Melahat Rafiei

Dear Honorable Fernando Aenlle-Rocha,

I hope you are well. I am writing to provide a character reference for my loved sister, Melahat Rafiei, who is currently facing sentencing. I respectfully request your leniency and understanding in her case, as I firmly believe she is compassionate, leads with integrity and cares for her community. She is an empathetic individual who has positively influenced my life and others around her. I have had the privilege of knowing Melahat Rafiei all my life, from the minute I was born.

Melahat has always demonstrated a deep sense of compassion and concern for others. Whether it was in high school, where she was actively involved in various clubs and even started the environmental club, or in her personal life, where she consistently shows care and support for her family and friends, Melahat's compassion is evident in everything she does.

Integrity is another hallmark of Melahat's character. From a young age, she has stood up for what is right and just. I recall an incident in the second grade where she bravely confronted a group of boys who had stolen her sister's purse and took the matter to the principal, earning an honorable award for her actions. This unwavering commitment to integrity has been constant throughout her life.

Melahat's work ethic is truly commendable. Coming from an immigrant background, she has always been a hard worker, juggling multiple jobs while attending college. Her dedication only intensified when she became the main provider for her family, often working long hours to ensure their well-being. Her perseverance and determination are truly inspiring.

In addition to her personal qualities, Melahat has consistently shown a strong commitment to community involvement. She has always strived to make a difference, whether through her leadership in various clubs or her efforts to support and uplift those around her. Her passion for community service is a testament to her selflessness and dedication to making the world a better place.

In conclusion, Melahat Rafiei is an exceptional individual who possesses many positive and strong qualities, and I wholeheartedly request that you consider these aspects of her character

when determining her sentence and show her leniency. She has had such a positive impact on our lives and others around her and the lack of her presence will be very impactful. Thank you for your attention to this matter, and for considering my request. If you require any further information or have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Meymanet Ganwani

[REDACTED]

Amar Ganwani  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

April 3, 2025

Honorable Fernando Aenlle-Rocha  
First Street Courthouse  
350 W. 1st Street, Courtroom 6B, 6th Floor  
Los Angeles, CA 90012  
Subject: Reference for Melahat Rafiei

Dear Honorable Fernando Aenlle-Rocha,

I hope this letter finds you well. I am writing to provide a character reference for my beloved sister-in-law, Melahat Rafiei, who is currently facing sentencing. I humbly implore your leniency and understanding in her case, as I firmly believe that she is a genuinely kind-hearted and compassionate individual who has positively impacted the lives of those around her.

I have had the privilege of knowing Melahat Rafiei for over 15 years, and throughout this time, I have witnessed her unwavering generosity, selflessness, and commitment to her family and loved ones. She has repeatedly demonstrated a deep sense of empathy and a willingness to help others in need. Her actions exemplify the true meaning of compassion and benevolence.

One of the most remarkable qualities that Melahat Rafiei possesses is her tremendous capacity to love. She has a heart that knows no bounds and extends her affection to everyone she encounters. In particular, I have personally witnessed the profound love and care she has for my three daughters. She has played an integral role in their lives, offering them guidance, support, and an abundance of love. Her positive influence on their upbringing cannot be overstated.

Moreover, I have had the privilege of observing Melahat Rafiei in her role as a mother to her own son. She exhibits exceptional dedication and commitment to her child's well-being. She provides a nurturing environment, fosters a strong sense of values, and encourages his growth and development. Her dedication as a mother is an undeniable testament to her character and her ability to create a loving and stable home.

Furthermore, I would like to highlight Melahat Rafiei's financial responsibility and commitment to her family. Even after her divorce, she has continued to shoulder the financial burden of her son's education and extracurricular activities. She pays for his private school tuition, music lessons, and other enriching activities, ensuring that he receives the best opportunities for growth and development. Her financial sacrifices reflect her unwavering devotion as a mother and her commitment to providing her son with a bright future.

In conclusion, I sincerely believe that Melahat Rafiei is an extraordinary individual who has made significant contributions to her family and community. Her generous nature, loving heart, and exemplary parenting skills make her an invaluable member of society. I respectfully request that you consider these aspects of her character when determining her sentence, and I wholeheartedly implore you to show her leniency, allowing her to continue positively impacting the lives of those around her.

Thank you for your attention to this matter, and for considering my request. If you require any further information or have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Amar Ganwani

Daniel Fierro  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

May 25, 2024

The Hon. Fernando L. Aenlle-Rocha  
Central District of California, United States District Court  
First Street Courthouse  
350 W. 1st Street, Courtroom 6B, 6th Floor  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

RE: Melahat Rafiei

Dear Judge Aenlle-Rocha:

I have known Melahat Rafiei for over a decade, since a mutual client introduced us in 2013. She has been a friend through some of the most challenging episodes of my life. Given that, watching her legal troubles unfold over the last couple years has saddened me deeply. I understand that there is much I do not know and will not know. My only aim here is to respectfully lay out what I do know in the hope that it gives you context which might inform the decisions you must make.

First: In my experience, Melahat has been generous and well-intentioned with her time, energy, and professional leadership. I have watched her go out of her way to lift new entrants to the public sphere, including myself, and to create opportunities for individuals without prior entre. She has stood by her friends in the face of withering and unfair criticism, and she has put aside petty grievances to help those in need. She has, in my direct experience, always done so with an integrity and directness that is not common in professional politics.

Second: Melahat is a devoted mother; I've watched her put her son at the center of her world since I've met her. With humility, I imagine that among your priorities at sentencing must exist an imperative to consider the all the effects of your decision on individuals and how that contributes towards a just resolution. I cannot speak to the harm she has stipulated to having caused, or to the degree to which restitution would or even could be accomplished by sentencing Melahat to serve time in prison. From what I have observed and heard first-hand, I can confidently say that her son would suffer an inestimable and irreparable loss. I would wonder at the justice of a sentence that forever negatively alters the trajectory of a boy entering his teenage years and all that entails over his lifetime. I do not disagree that justice must be served, and that restitution must be made: I only ask if those goals might be accomplished in a manner that minimizes the harm to an innocent child and aligns with the global impact of the offenses of which she has been accused.

Third: Melahat has expressed to me, on multiple occasions over the past year, a deep remorse over the actions and decisions that have led to this point, as well as a sincere desire to make the most of her life after her sentence to simply raise her son to be a good man and to contribute to her community and removing herself entirely from politics. She has discussed pursuing a career in construction management and interior design and is already taking concrete steps to make such a path a viable possibility. She is prepared to willingly and enthusiastically change her life dramatically as part of her efforts to atone and see justice served.



Thank you for your kind attention.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Daniel Fierro". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "D" and a horizontal line extending from the end of the name.

Daniel G. Fierro

The Honorable Fernando L. Aenlle-Rocha  
District Judge  
First Street Court House  
350 W. 1<sup>st</sup> Street  
Los Angeles CA 90012

8/5/2025

Dear Judge Aenlle-Rocha

My name is Maggie Cakebread, and I have had the privilege of knowing Melahat Rafiei for over twenty years through our shared commitment to community volunteer work. Over these two decades, I have come to know Melahat as a woman of exceptional empathy, dedication, and moral conviction. I write this letter in full awareness of the serious charges to which she has pled, and with the sincere hope that the Court will consider her history, character, and contributions in your deliberation.

Throughout our friendship, I have held leadership roles in nonprofit organizations serving populations such as the formerly incarcerated, at-risk youth, and children in dependency systems. I currently work for a criminal defense attorney in Orange County, California. In all my professional and personal experiences, I have rarely encountered someone who demonstrates the kind of selfless commitment to community that Melahat does. Despite facing significant legal adversity, Melahat has continued—quietly and without seeking recognition—to support and uplift those in need.

Melahat's character has been shaped by a traumatic emigration experience and the unshakable love of her Iranian family. Her resilience and fierce commitment to justice come not from abstract ideals, but from lived experience. She sees those who are marginalized and takes concrete, compassionate action. Her work in the community is not performative—it is rooted in a deep understanding of struggle and an authentic desire to make a difference.

I have witnessed Melahat take full responsibility for her actions. She has shown sincere remorse and never attempted to minimize or deflect her role. She has endured profound personal losses, including her income, reputation, and many friendships. Yet she remains steadfast in her commitment to personal growth and public service. Her optimism and integrity remain unshaken.

In my professional opinion—and based on extensive experience working with those impacted by the criminal justice system—Melahat poses no risk of recidivism. Her current legal circumstances are completely out of step with the values and behaviors I have seen consistently over the last twenty years.

I respectfully ask the Court to consider allowing Melahat to remain in the community where she can continue to do the work that she does so well—not just for her own redemption, but for the many people whose lives she touches.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration.

Margaret Cakebread

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

April 7, 2025

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

The Honorable Fernando Aenlle-Rocha  
First Street Courthouse  
350 W. 1st Street, Courtroom 6B, 6th Floor  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Dear Judge Aenlle-Rocha:

I am writing this letter on behalf of my dear friend Melahat Rafiei, who is slated to be sentenced in your courtroom in July. I have known her for nearly 20 years as an exceptional Democratic party political consultant, but more importantly, a thoughtful and kind person who treated people with respect and defended the most vulnerable among us – elders, youth, people of color. She has no fear and a strong protective streak.

My strongest memory was from 2009 when Melahat was the campaign manager for Irvine Mayor Beth Krom, who was running for Congress. Mrs. Krom's son, Noah, was about to graduate from UC Santa Barbara when, days before graduation, he fell from a cliff at Isla Vista to his death. Melahat called me to tell me the news and asked me to edit a statement written by a team member. After 90 minutes, I called the team member to ask how the statement was coming and she had been so distraught over the news that she could not write it. The Krom family have been longtime friends, so I took over the statement and routed it to Melahat, who took charge of it and had the impossible task of reading it to the grieving parents. I can't imagine dealing with the grief and courage Melahat had to that day, being there for the Kroms and managing dozens of media calls.

It was, through Melahat's urging, that Mrs. Krom remains an advocate for greater safety steps at Isla Vista even though other students have perished as Noah did. When another student dies, Mrs. Krom is one of the first to reach out to the family to offer comfort and reconciliation. This is because of Melahat's efforts from 16 years ago.

Melahat is a proud mother who worked to make sure her son was loved and supported despite her marriage ending in divorce. She reached out to her husband's new wife to co-parent with her and Melahat's son gained the benefit of three parents who loved him. She did this by putting her family first. That approach extends to her parents and siblings.

During the course of our friendship, I have relied on her to listen and offer advice on a variety of issues. And I've offered the same support in return. Friends are there for

each other when support is needed most. She has been there for me. And I will be there for her.

She is a good and kind person. I am asking if you would consider a monetary fine and probation as an appropriate sentence instead of incarceration. She is remorseful and wants to be there for her son who will be going through his teen years. Please allow her to guide him through this period of his life.

I'm grateful for your time and attention to this letter. I ask your mercy for my friend Melahat.

Sincerely,

Dan Chmielewski

Honorable Fernando Aenlle-Rocha  
First Street Courthouse  
350 W. 1st Street, Courtroom 6B, 6th Floor  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Your Honor:

I met Melahat in Howard Dean's presidential campaign, twenty years ago. I've had more years than I care to count in that world, and I watch volunteers carefully, especially the first timers. We had a lot of novices that cycle, but Melahat stood out. She said as a refugee, she felt it was a patriotic duty to be involved as a citizen. She was, for me, a standout. Most of the first timers used "I don't know how to do that" for anything that wasn't sufficiently high level in their minds, assuming that someone, usually me, would do it and they would take the credit.

Melahat was the only one who said "I don't know how to do that, will you teach me, please?" Which I was happy to do. Whatever she did, she worked hard, did her best and made sure she knew the rules. She was always stretching her skills and learning more. It was no surprise to me to see her move up quickly in the structure, being trusted with more and more responsibility. She was a good boss and treated people well regardless of how "important" they were.

It was no surprise to me that after the election, Melahat chose to continue her involvement in politics. It was to my great pleasure that by then we were good friends. Friends to the degree that when she married her now ex-husband Kwame, I designed and made her exactly the wedding dress she wanted. We are close friends who are in frequent contact. She's been hugely generous and helpful during the last two years since I got very ill. She is a treasure.

I know her to be open, giving, trustworthy and honest. And I know her to be one of the best mothers, other than my own, that I have ever met. Her son Kian is bright, happy and has the confidence that only a child who knows they are loved unconditionally can have. She has taught him well, by example, that the way to live a happy life is to live an honest life.

I'm a cynical old reporter who, in retirement, works in politics occasionally. I'm considered a fair judge of people. I suspect I know Melahat better than her own mother, and the Melahat I know and love is honest, profoundly patriotic, ethical and, simply, a good person.

**Ann Solomon**  
**31 January 2023**

Honorable Fernando Aenlle-Rocha,

Hello, my name is David Overton. I worked for over 40 years in the fire service before I retired from the City of Oceanside (California) in 2023. I first met Melahat over 15 years ago. A close friend introduced her to me while working with Local 3736 in the capacity of the Oceanside Firefighters Association's union president. From the moment I met her she was very kind, knowledgeable, energetic. These traits are the reasons she very quickly became a role model for me. I was new to the position, and her patience and guidance was needed and greatly appreciated. This was a new board of directors and a time when the entire board was learning to work together. Melahat spent many late nights helping us organize and prepare for interviews for endorsement of City Council candidates. Mel kept the team motivated and even sponsored several of our late nights with "team building pizzas".

Mel has always been there for me. Her work ethic is incredible. During one of my several union emergencies, she would be there day or night, even weekends. Mel would answer her phone and/or travel to Oceanside just to give me advice and guidance. There were some long conversations, especially after stressful conversations with sitting council members on improving fire department response times, staffing and capabilities. She demonstrated extraordinary compassion in these situations and presented me with the most ethical way to approach the person and opinion. It was this work ethic that motivated me to work even harder, eventually improving my working knowledge base and experience.

Mel was a big reason I became so involved in the community and fire association I represented. She introduced me to fundraisers for the Mission San Luis Rey and Charity golf tournaments for the Fil-Am community and other charities. She introduced me to the NAACP organization, which turned out to be more than just an event. This led to making many friends, some which I still consider family to this day. That includes Mel. She will go out of her way to help others. She taught me to put yourself "out there" and help others when you're able.

Sincerely,

David Overton  
Fire Captain, Retired

[REDACTED]